

Our Journey to the Cross
Good Friday 2024
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The hill is quiet now. Many of the onlookers have gone home, but a few are still here. We are still here. Over the past few hours, we've been watching the tragic events unfold. We've seen soldiers marching, hammers pounding, tears falling. We've heard mocking taunts and loud groans and anguished cries. It was agonizing *for us* as the nails pierced his flesh and a spear was plunged into his side. It must have been excruciating *for him*.

But now it is over. The mocking has ceased. The groaning has come to a merciful end. The soldiers are busy with the business of cleaning up the dead. Two well-meaning men have come forward to help. They are given the body of Jesus. As they prepare to take him away, we look around the hill one last time. We see the relics of his death: a make-shift sign proclaiming him king, a braided crown of thorns with scarlet tips, some rusty nails tossed into a box.

As the events have transpired, we have seen what Jesus brought to the cross. As they tore his skin, Jesus offered *forgiveness* to his captors. As the multitudes mocked him, he promised *acceptance* to a crook. As his life slowly ebbed away, he showed *compassion* to his mother and the disciple closest to him. And with arms stretched out wide, he offered *a heart full of love* to a world in desperate need. That's what Jesus brought.

Now it's our turn. What will we bring to the cross? We haven't been asked to paint the sign or shape the crown or carry the nails. But we are invited to walk the path behind our Lord and to leave something at the cross.

How about leaving your *bad moments*? Your bad habits. Your selfish moods and little white lies. Your careless words and lustful glances. Your impatience and intolerance. Your binges and bigotry. God wants them all. Every flop, every single failure. Why? Because God knows our lives would be better if we could let them go.

Don't pretend nothing is wrong. Not tonight. Don't pretend you don't fall. Instead, make a vow that when you do, you will take your first step in the direction of the cross. First John tells us: "If we confess our sins, God can always be trusted to forgive us and to take our sins away" (1 John 1:9).

What will you bring to the cross? How about giving God your *angry moments*? We all know some friends who aren't always friendly. Neighbors who aren't always neighborly. Churchgoers who can be a bit too controlling. Workers who almost never work and bosses who are almost always bossy. We've learned the hard way that a promise made isn't always a promise kept. And we get angry.

When we do, it's easy to start making lists: "He messed up *this*! She failed to do *that*! Just look at what they've done to me!" The Apostle Paul cautions against it: "Love does not keep a record of wrongs." Paul is telling us that it's much more difficult to go through life with bitterness than with love. How about leaving your anger at the cross? You'd be better off without it.

What will you bring to the cross? How about giving God your *anxious moments*? As human beings, we can worry about almost anything. Our health or home, our jobs or finances, our children or grandchildren, our pets or popularity. We can obsess over what others may think of us, or how we're doing in our daily work, or when the next school shooting might occur.

When you find yourself getting anxious—and who doesn't—try looking again at the pieces of the passion. The crown he wore. The nails he felt. The cries he made. The blood he shed. All of this is done *for you*. Knowing this, why not try trusting him to take care of you now? Take your worries to the cross. Paul writes: "God did not hold back his own Son, but gave him up for us all. If God did this, won't he freely give us everything else?" (Rm 8:32).

What will you bring to the cross? I have one more suggestion. Why not bring God your *final moment*. Unless Christ returns first, you and I will have one. A final moment. A final breath. A final heartbeat. We'll leave the security of what we know and enter the world of what we don't.

Oh, we try not to think about it. We tend to like it here. And there are still so many things we want to do. As we approach our final day, Jesus wants us to trust him. "Do not let your hearts be troubled," he assures us, "Someday I will come for you and will take you home to be with me." Friend, if you are troubled about your final moment, leave it here at the cross.

The hill is quiet now. But there is still time for you to come to the cross. Bring your bad moments, your angry moments, your anxious moments, your final moment, and any other moment you feel moved to bring. That's why he died, after all. Bring them here, and he will exchange them for a heart full of love.